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# Addressing Patient Loyalty Through Their Commitment Influenced by Electronic Word-of-Mouth and Hospital's Image

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## Abstract

This article explores the influence of Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WoM) and hospital image on hospital patient loyalty, emphasizing the mediating role of patient commitment. Amidst the development of the healthcare industry sector in Indonesia, this study highlighted that e-WoM and hospital image significantly enhanced patient loyalty, with patient commitment playing an important mediating role. This article suggested practical strategies for hospitals, such as improving the quality of healthcare services, leveraging positive e-WoM, and implementing loyalty programs to elevate patient commitment and loyalty. These findings underscore the importance of hospital image and e-WoM in patient retention, providing valuable insights for strategic planning in the context of the healthcare industry.

**Keywords:** acceptance and commitment therapy, healthcare sector, hospital-patient relations, marketing of health services, patient navigation

## Introduction

A hospital is a provider of health services to the community; therefore, hospitals must provide satisfactory medical services for patients. To maintain the quality of medical services, hospital management must be responsive to patient needs and desires so that each patient receives quality, effective and efficient services for their health improvement.<sup>1</sup> Improving the quality of hospital services must be followed by marketing activities so that patients are aware of the existence of hospital services.<sup>2</sup> The increasing number of hospitals and increasingly stringent hospital marketing regulations force hospital managers to be more creative and innovative in attracting patients. Today, the form that meets patient expectations in the hospital industry must include good physical facilities, accurate and fast service processes, and reliable employees.<sup>3</sup> Quality of service is the basis for the survival of a hospital. The program of improving quality and patient safety through an integrated quality management approach is an important requirement for hospitals to survive and grow.<sup>4</sup> Improving the quality of service has a positive impact on improving patient quality.<sup>5</sup>

The image of a hospital is influenced by many factors, such as good facilities, good environment, long history of the hospital, low costs, good attitude of doctors, sophisticated medical equipment, and past experience.<sup>6</sup> According to Grönroos, the image of a hospital is formed through what patients receive as a result of transactions between service providers and users and how they receive these services.<sup>7</sup> A previous study stated that factors determining a hospital's image include the quality of doctors, treatment facilities and technology, diagnostic capabilities, and overall service quality.<sup>8</sup> Another study stated that the dominant perception of patients towards medical personnel (doctors) is thought to have a positive impact on their assessment of the hospital's image.<sup>9</sup> This positive perception makes patients believe that their illness can be cured by using hospital services, stating that a hospital with a good image concept can complement a good identity and ultimately lead to patient loyalty.<sup>10</sup>

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Trust is the credibility, promise, and goodness of the hospital that is expected or felt by the patient. When trust is built, a committed relationship between the hospital and the patient can be mutually beneficial.<sup>11</sup> Substandard and discriminatory experiences with health care providers and staff can contribute to increased distrust of the hospital,<sup>12</sup> which can lead to decreased patient satisfaction and loyalty.<sup>13</sup> Conversely, higher trust was associated with better self-assessment of health status and better adherence to care plans, suggesting that overall health system strategies can be used to improve patient satisfaction and loyalty.<sup>14</sup> Patient loyalty is defined as the patient's efforts to remain loyal to a product through recognition, strong impressions of quality, trust and pride and then making repeat purchases.<sup>15</sup>

This study aimed to analyze how a hospital's image and e-WoM affected patient loyalty, with patient commitment as a mediating variable. Patient commitment is the emotional and psychological bond they have with the hospital, which influences their decision to remain loyal to using hospital services in the future. Referring to previous studies,<sup>16,17</sup> patient commitment can be a key factor mediating the relationship between positive perceptions (hospital's image and e-WoM) and patient loyalty. Therefore, understanding the role of patient commitment in this relationship would provide deeper insights into how hospitals could enhance patient loyalty through strategies focused on enhancing the hospital's image and e-WoM.

## Method

Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WoM) refers to positive or negative statements made by potential, actual, or former patients about a product or company, which can be accessed by many people or institutions via the internet.<sup>18</sup> This includes all informal communications directed to consumers via internet technology regarding the characteristics of particular goods, services or sellers.<sup>19</sup> E-WoM involves consumers' comments or recommendations based on their experiences, significantly influencing other consumers' decision making.<sup>20</sup> Social media is the most commonly used platform for e-WoM activities,<sup>21</sup> driven by emotional attachment and the desire to belong, encouraging consumers to leave positive reviews.<sup>22</sup> In this study on e-WoM at hospitals, it could be measured using three indicators: Intensity, Opinion Valence, and Content.

Corporate image is the public's perception, view and opinion of a company. Formed through processing information from various sources.<sup>23</sup> and based on knowledge and experience.<sup>24</sup> Corporate image reflects the views of external stakeholders, especially patients.<sup>25</sup> According to various experts, corporate image is an impression or perception based on the knowledge and experience of individuals or society towards the company.<sup>26</sup> In hospitals, corporate image can be measured through Corporate Reputation, Personality, Values and Identity.

Patient commitment is essential in relationship marketing, defined as the desire to maintain a valuable relationship.<sup>27</sup> It involves a belief in the importance of continuing the relationship.<sup>28</sup> Commitment is essential for patient retention and loyalty.<sup>29</sup> This commitment can be divided into Affective Commitment, Normative Commitment, and Continuance Commitment, each of which represents a different motivation for maintaining a relationship with the hospital.

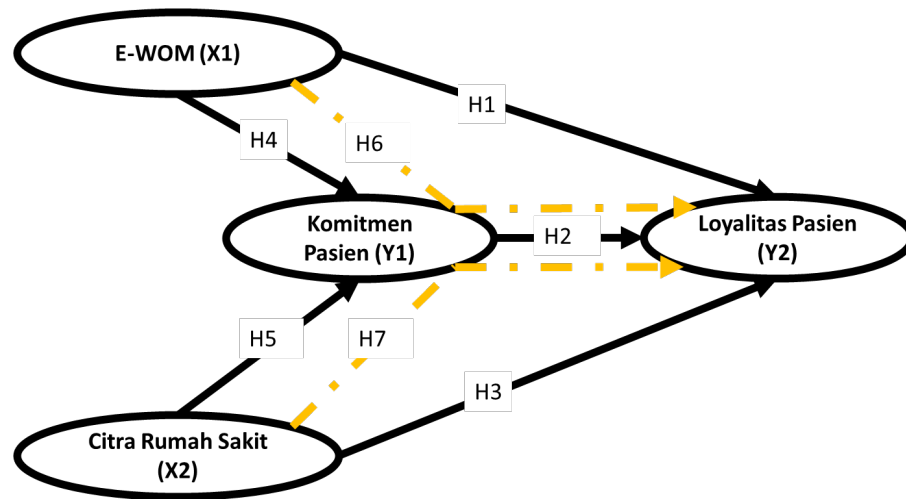
Patient loyalty has a significant impact on the future of the hospital industry. Loyal patients continue to use hospital products and services, trusting the hospital to manage their finances.<sup>30</sup> Loyalty is characterized by regular repeat purchases, purchases across product lines, recommending the hospital to others, and showing resistance to competitors.<sup>31-33</sup> Loyal patients actively promote the hospital's products and services, thereby contributing to the hospital's long-term success.

Overall, the concepts of e-WoM, corporate image, patient commitment and loyalty are interrelated and critical to the success of a hospital. Understanding and measuring these factors can help hospitals improve their relationships with patients and increase their competitive advantage.

## Results and Discussion

### *Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WoM)*

Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WoM) is a concept referring to information, reviews, or recommendations shared by healthcare users online. In the current digital era, E-WoM has a significant influence in shaping public perceptions of an institution, including hospitals. Satisfied patients often share their positive experiences through various digital platforms such as social media, health forums, or review sites. These reviews and recommendations cannot only strengthen the hospital's image, but also act as an effective marketing tool, which can attract new patients.



Notes:  
 e-WoM (X1) = Electronic Word-of-Mouth  
 Citra Rumah Sakit (X2) = Hospital's Image  
 Komitmen Pasien (Y1) = Patient Commitment  
 Loyalitas Pasien (Y2) = Patient Loyalty

Figure 1. Research Model

In the context of hospitals, e-WoM can be an important strategy to build and maintain a positive corporate image. Patients who have experienced quality services tend to share their experiences online, which can be a reference for other potential patients. A previous study shows that e-WoM has a strong influence on consumer decisions, especially in the service industry.<sup>34</sup> In this case, positive reviews from previous patients can increase potential patients' trust in the hospital and encourage them to choose health services at that hospital.

In addition, e-WoM can also function as feedback for hospitals to continue to improve the quality of their services. By paying attention to reviews and input from patients, hospitals can make necessary improvements, which not only increase patient satisfaction but also strengthen the overall image of the hospital. A previous study<sup>18</sup> also underlines the importance of e-WoM as a communication tool that can influence patient loyalty in the long term. Thus, in an increasingly digitally connected world, e-WoM can be a key to a hospital's success in attracting and retaining patients.

### Corporate Image

Corporate image is the public's perception of an institution, including hospitals, which reflects the quality of service, reputation, and trust built by the institution. This perception is formed from patient experiences, public opinion, and communication carried out by the hospital through various media. In the context of hospitals, a positive corporate image is an important asset in attracting and retaining patients. This is because patients prefer to choose hospitals with a good image, which can provide a sense of security and confidence in receiving health services.

Previous studies have shown that corporate image plays an important role in building patient loyalty. A study revealed that a strong corporate image can influence consumer perceptions of the quality of service received.<sup>35</sup> In the healthcare industry, this means that hospitals with a positive image tend to be more trusted by patients, which in turn increases their loyalty to the hospital. In addition, a previous study found that a positive corporate image can increase patient trust and satisfaction, which are important factors in creating long-term loyalty.<sup>36</sup>

In the context of hospitals, building and maintaining a good corporate image is an important strategy in facing the increasingly tight competition in the healthcare industry. By a good reputation, the hospital can strengthen its position as the main choice for patients in the region and surroundings. With increasing competition between hospitals, a strong corporate image not only serves as a tool to attract new patients, but also to maintain the loyalty of existing patients. This is in line with the results of a previous study emphasizing that a good corporate image can be an effective differentiation in a competitive market environment.<sup>37</sup>

### Patient Commitment

Patient commitment is a key factor in maintaining and increasing loyalty to a hospital. This commitment reflects the patient's desire to continue using hospital services in the future, and plays an important role in creating a long-term

relationship between patients and healthcare providers. In the context of hospital, the patient's commitment can be influenced by various factors, including the hospital's image and e-WoM.

A positive corporate image can increase patients' trust and confidence in the quality of hospital services, which in turn strengthens their commitment to continue choosing the hospital in the future. As revealed by Morgan and Hunt's,<sup>16</sup> trust and commitment are two main pillars in building a long-term, mutually beneficial relationship between an organization and patients. By a good image of hospital, patients feel more confident and satisfied, encouraging them to remain loyal and not switch to other healthcare providers.

In addition, e-WoM also plays an important role in forming patient commitment. Positive information and reviews shared online by other patients can provide confidence to prospective patients that they will receive quality services at the hospital. A previous study<sup>38</sup> found that e-WoM can strengthen patients' positive perceptions of an institution, which ultimately increases their commitment to continue using the service. Highly-committed patients are not only more loyal, but are also more likely to recommend the hospital to others, which expands the hospital's patient base. Furthermore, patient commitment often serves as a mediator between corporate image, e-WoM, and patient loyalty. A previous study revealed that commitment can be a bridge connecting positive patient perceptions (such as corporate image and e-WoM) with higher loyalty.<sup>17</sup> In this case, commitment acts as a reinforcing factor ensuring that patients not only have a positive view of the hospital, but are also moved to act on that view, such as continuing to use the hospital's services and recommending it to others. Therefore, building patient commitment is an important strategic step for hospitals in achieving long-term sustainability and growth.

### *Patient Loyalty*

Patient loyalty means an essential element in the healthcare industry, particularly for private hospitals where the survival and success of the institution largely depend on how well they can retain existing patients and attract new patients. This loyalty reflects the patient's desire to continue using the hospital's services on an ongoing basis, as well as their desire to recommend the services to others. In this context, the hospital's image and e-WoM play an important role in shaping and maintaining patient loyalty. The hospital's image comprising reputation, quality of service, and trust built by a hospital can influence how patients perceive the hospital. When a hospital's image is positive, patients tend to feel more confident and satisfied with the services they receive, which ultimately increases their loyalty. On the other hand, e-WoM consisting of reviews and recommendations shared by patients through online platforms also has a significant impact. Patients reading positive reviews from other patients tend to trust the hospital more and choose it as their healthcare provider.

### **Conclusion**

A hospital's image can be considered as the overall trust and commitment of patients, which ultimately leads to their loyalty. Similarly, e-WoM can influence new and old patients, encouraging them to be more committed and loyal to the hospital. Patient commitment can bridge the hospital's image and e-WoM to patient loyalty. It is expected that the findings of this study will provide practical insights for hospital management. The hospital industry as a whole, helping hospitals develop strategies to enhance patient loyalty through enhancing corporate image and effective e-WoM management. Future study is essential to measure empirical study of these variables into selected hospital subjects.

### **Abbreviations**

e-WoM: Electronic Word-of-Mouth.

### **Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate**

Not applicable.

### **Competing Interest**

All authors have no conflict of interests in this article.

### **Availability of Data and Materials**

Not applicable.

### **Authors' Contribution**

AQ conducted secondary data collection, data processing, analysis and interpretation, and writing the first draft of manuscript. AP, SZ, and N involved in scientific inputs and review the manuscript.

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